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ABSTRACT

Career counseling is a particularly critical need for blue collar men, displaced workers from the declining industries of manufacturing. This article uses developmental theory based on the model of adult development of Daniel Levinson (1978), "Seasons of a Man's Life," to discuss the difficulty of blue collar men in attaining developmental progress in the face of longterm unemployment. The paper details the vocational counseling techniques used in the Lorain, Ohio, public library adult career planning center. As a corollary, the article discusses the dynamics of adult information seeking behavior and the uses of vocational information by adult clients. A very short list of references is provided. (Author/KC)

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THE CHALLENGE OF THE '80's AND BEYOND: CAREER PLANNING AND THE ADULT BLUE COLLAR WORKER

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ABSTRACT

Career counseling is a particularly critical need for blue collar men, displaced workers from the declining industries of manufacturing. The article uses developmental theory based on the model of adult development of Daniel Levinson (1978), Seasons of a Man's Life, to discuss the difficulty of blue collar men in attaining developmental progress in the face of longterm unemployment. The author details the vocational counseling techniques utilized in a public library adult career planning center. As a corollary, the article discusses the dynamics of adult information seeking behavior and the uses of vocational information by adult clients.

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Blue collar workers have been profoundly effected as the American economy evolves from traditional manufacturing industries toward new technologies and service-based industries. As the director of Project ACTION (ADULT CAREER AND TRAINING INFORMATION FOR OCCUPATIONAL NEEDS) in Lorain, Ohio, my concern is meeting the needs of workers in transition to enable them to successfully engage in self-assessment, develop skills in job searching career planning issues, and utilize a wide range of occupational information. Our comprehensive service is used by approximately 125 clients per month, both in individual consultation or at workshops conducted by myself and/or my assistant. While our service is based in a public library and open to any adult in Lorain County, approximately three-quarters of our clients are men on longterm layoff from a declining industry, in their early to late 30's, and in a critical phase of adult development. Levinson (1978) has clearly defined the challenges faced by men in their 30's as they refine and re-direct their life choices, values and goals. Occupational success is a key component of life challenges for men in this era; I will correlate ACTION's goal concerns to the evolution of the life course during the Settling Down phase. Levinson (1978, p. 150) outlines five possible sequences a man's life can follow during the Settling Down period; (A) Advancement within a stable life structure. (B) Serious failure or decline within a stable life structure. (C) Breaking Out: trying for a new life structure. (D) Advancement which itself produces a change in life structure. (E) Unstable life structure.

Our methods are value based. Unemployment has forced our clients out of Pattern A. Our concern is enabling them to attain C or D and continue a life pattern based on optimal psycho-social satisfaction and integrity.

THE END OF BLUE COLLAR WORK?

Displaced workers, defined as individuals who have been laid off from

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a job and have little or no chance of returning, represent a new challenge to adult career planning personnel. A recent ERIC report (1983) - Fact Sheet No. 21 - summarized the dimensions of the problem:

. By the end of 1980, one-fourth of auto workers had become unemployed. Currently, even as the auto industry has recovered, over-all employment is only at two-thirds of the level of 1980.

. Recent estimates place the number of displaced workers at a maximum of 800,000.

. Job opportunities in manufacturing-related occupations will continue to decline. Semi-skilled crafts workers and operators will continue to be replaced by machines. New openings will be in the service sector and in maintenance and repair occupations.

. Current and future trends indicate growth in the number of displaced workers.

. While the number of displaced workers is increasing, community resources available to provide assistance will continue to decline during the 1980's.

. Older displaced workers may resist relocation programs. The glut on local housing markets after large layoffs makes moving financially impossible for some.

The same report defines the salient features of the typical displaced worker. He is typically male, not highly educated, a union member with several years' seniority prior to layoff, and with a relatively successful and stable work history.

Project ACTION users generally fit the profile of the displaced worker described above. If I were to draw a composite of a "typical" client, I would describe him as in his mid- to late-30's, married, with 2 - 5 children, of Eastern European, Appalachian, Black or Hispanic background. In addition, he is a homeowner, military veteran, has 7 - 10 years of experience at a steel mill or auto plant, and has never contemplated working anywhere else.

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One key element not adequately addressed from a theoretical perspective needs to be understood if effective counseling for these clients is to be implemented. While Levinson (1978) writes extensively of the "ladder," progression up a series of steps in career advancement during the '30's, the concept is not relevant to the life experience of men who have worked in a unionized environment.

Shorris (1981) provides insight on how the effect of the union removes the necessity for blue collar men to compete with each other.

> "Wage agreements made through collective bargaining contribute to the class unity of blue collar workers. The knowledge that all men on an assembly line who do similar work earn the same wage eliminates the sense of work as competition, uniting men in far-reaching ways." (p. 145)

Shorris reinforces his point by his description of the assembly line as "a place where secrets have no use and no place, for the leveling of unionism and of the line itself relieves men of the need to compete; if the workers on the line struggle, they struggle together against the boss, the working conditions or the work itself." (p. 144)

The challenge for blue collar men on longterm layoff is to come to grips with painful reality; their jobs are probably gone forever and they will need to assess their past experience, develop a plan for the future and negotiate a transition they never expected to face.

PROJECT ACTION METHOD

Two inter-related components form the base of ACTION's operational core: (A) Individual client assessment and skill-building, and (B) Utilization of Occupational Information/Educational Training Materials. The concept of "empowerment" (Bolles, 1984) is central to our goals; can we enable our clients to gain the self-awareness, knowledge of their transferable skills and competence in

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utilizing occupational information sources for effective vocational decision-making now and in the future? Bolles (1980) also has defined the essence of the vocational counseling interview in a series of steps: "I. What does this client perceive his/her problem to be? What do I perceive his/her problem to be. II. Does the client know what transferable skills he/she has and which of these he/she most enjoys and does best?" The rest of the steps are concerned with identifying and approaching organizations using the individual's skills and being hired by that organization.

Blue collar workers often have a difficult time in developing an understanding of how their experience in a routinized job can involve transferable skills, and lack self-confidence and self-esteem.

We find that going over an extensive checklist of skill areas with an individual client is often useful as a method of pinpointing skills. Krannich (1983, P. 90-95) has developed a list of skills, inter-personal, attitudinal and functional, that we use with an individual client to familiarize him/her with the concept of transferable skills.

Our clients almost always want to develop a resume, even if they haven't yet defined a new career goal or developed an understanding of how resumes are used. The resume concept is deeply ingrained in the popular consciousness and viewed as a mystical path to a job. We work on de-mystifying the resume and re-define it as a pragmatic tool. We will not work on a resume with a client until the self-assessment and goal-setting process has been undertaken.

The resume writing process is quite valuable as an esteem-building exercise for our clients. Levinson (1978) has described the BOOM (Becoming One's Own Man) Phase of a man's late 30's. Prior to their layoff, our clients were generally succeeding in the developmental tasks of this era, becoming more senior

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members of their community, family and workplace, speaking with more authority and authenticity. Deprived of the self-assurance and dignity that come from being a breadwinner, their self-esteem has been shaken. By working on their resume, they become aware of their successful past experience and the skills they have developed, which hopefully will enable them to succeed again. Defining a career/educational goal and devising an implementation plan also is a powerful tool toward building self-esteem.

VOCATIONAL INFORMATION

Fredrickson (1984) recently discussed what he termed "an embarrassing problem" for vocational guidance practitioners: the lack of career information materials offered to career counseling clients. He cites numerous surveys to document his assertion. Fredrickson discusses the vital role of career information as an essential component in clarifying and identifying short-term and lifetime goals.

> "Career information helps clients to be more specific about their personal goals; aspiration levels are matched with ability assessments; goals are translated into meaningful terms; personal goals are examined in light of the reality of the world of work." (p. 288)

Hoppock (1966) crystallized the centrality of accurate, comprehensive occupational information as vital to the career planning process. Project ACTION follows in the philosophical tradition established by Hoppock and others, most notably Fine (1980). ACTION's 1,000 volume collection of vocational planning material is displayed on four 36" sections of 42" high library shelving. The core collection also breaks down a barrier to use that traditionally has existed in public libraries, namely, knowledge of the Dewey Decimal system. Our shelves are arranged by functional interest area; the shelf categories read: FOR WOMEN, REFERENCE, JOB SEARCHING, RESUME WRITING, CAREER FIELDS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING and

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career planning. The user is not confused by being sent throughout the library and can readily be oriented to using the collection effectively.

One final note on the ACTION collection and service. We are open to the entire community; our clients do not have to fill out intake forms or register; all they need to do is arrange an appointment for an individual counseling session. To use our vocational materials collection, all an individual needs is a library card; it is a freely circulating collection.

ADULT INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

An overview of the literature concerning adult awareness of community-based vocational resource information reveals the existence of what may be termed an "information gap;" despite available programs, both public and private, the majority of adults are not aware of where to go for advice. Knox (1979) summarized adult information seeking behavior: (1) Most adults do not know about agencies offering job or career information in their communities; (2) Adults perceive the available career services in their localities as not being able to meet their needs; (3) Adults indicate acceptance of all methods and ways of receiving help; (4) Adults view printed materials, formal courses, cooperative work programs and the firsthand observation of work as more meaningful than computers, mass media techniques etc.; (5) Adults learn about available jobs through their work experience contacts and pursue these leads without assistance.

Chen (1982) conducted a massive survey of adult information seeking patterns by utilizing telephone interviews with 2,400 adults in six New England states. According to Chen's survey results, while information on job-related issues and/or getting and changing jobs ranked as the number one informational demand by adults in the survey, 67.4% of respondents found interpersonal information providers as most helpful in meeting their needs and did not utilize libraries, social agencies etc.

The need of the newly unemployed for career counseling was documented by Parsons, Griffore and LaMore (1983). They studied 171 newly unemployed adults in Lansing, Michigan. A survey of their informational needs ranked learning techniques of looking for work as number one in preference. Asked to rank how they preferred to receive information, the respondents expressed a strong preference for workshops and classes on looking for work, job re-training programs, resume preparation and interviewing skills.

SUMMARY

Career counseling for adults in transition is a critical need that will remain vitally important in the challenging and unsettled times ahead. American adults are facing unprecedented demands as they attempt to plan and prepare for the social and economic changes of the 1980's and beyond. Where can they find answers to their myriad questions concerning effective career/life planning? How can they find information on career fields and educational programs? What if they need help in preparing a resume or learning job interviewing skills?

Our professional responsibility will be to implement vital and viable vocational planning services enabling adults in our communities to prepare for a lifetime of challenge and change.

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